

THE  
CONFLAGRATION;

A POEM:

OCCASIONED BY THE LATE DESTRUCTIVE FIRE

AT

STOBOROUGH,

Near WAREHAM, DORSET;

On SUNDAY the 27th of APRIL, 1817.



*The Profits, (if any) to be given to the poor Sufferers on that  
melancholy occasion.*

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*The Village of Stoborough has twice within the last nine months, presented shocking scenes of desolation and misery.*

*In the month of July 1816, a Fire consumed fifteen Cottages, (besides other Buildings) the unfortunate Inhabitants of which had little opportunity of saving any part of their Household Goods, (a very small proportion being insured;) and in less than two hours, upwards of fifty individuals were, without a home!!*

*On the morning of Sunday the 27th April last, during the hours of divine service, another fire broke out in the same Village; which, though not producing such a mass of individual distress, yet, in its appearance and progress, was much more terrific and destructive than the first. An extensive Tannery was entirely consumed, and with it five Cottages, the habitations of poor labouring men, who, as in the former case, lost nearly their all!!*

*To alleviate the misfortunes of the first Sufferers, the hand of Charity did its utmost. Thanks to many kind and generous souls that hand has not been withheld now. At the same time it must be confessed,*

*that owing to the increased distresses of the times, and the frequent calls that are made on us by our suffering fellow Creatures, enough has not yet been done to meet the wants which the recent calamity has produced.*

*To supply in a trifling degree what can scarcely be expected from another public Subscription, the following lines were written and published, with a view to apply the Profits for the benefit of the unfortunate Sufferers.*

*Under other circumstances, the Author would have sent his Production into the world with fear and trembling; under the present, he is almost emboldened to look a Critic in the face, without dismay.*

*Wareham, June, 1817.*

The  
CONFLAGRATION,

O R

THE MOURNFUL SABBATH.

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Serene the Sabbath-morn awoke,  
The lark his lightsome slumbers broke,  
The greedy corm'rant sought his prey,  
The lapwing\* wheel'd his circling way;  
The rising sun o'er Redcliffe glancing,  
On Frome's unruffled breast was dancing;

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\* More generally known by the name of Pewit, from the cry which it continually utters.



## THE CONFLAGRATION.

Proud Creech his glad'ning ray partook,  
The pines that crown its summits shook  
Their dewy limbs; the ruin'd pile  
Of Corfe\* betrayed a mournful smile;  
Sweetly it play'd on Mary's || tower,  
And hill castellated of yore;†

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\*Corfe Castle, a venerable Saxon fortress, of amazing strength, built by King Edgar; demolished by gunpowder, by the Parliamentary forces, in 1645. It is remarkable for many interesting events in History, especially for the murder of Edward the Martyr, by Queen Elfrida.

||The Parish Church of Wareham; it stands on the site of an ancient Saxon structure, built A. D. 705. It was destroyed by the Danes, and rebuilt about the time of the Conquest.

Brictric, King of the West Saxons, and Edward the Martyr, were both buried here for a short time, but their bodies were afterwards removed, Brictric's to Tewkesbury, and Edward's to Shaftesbury.

†A Hill or Mount on the north side of the Frome, where formerly stood a Castle, either of Roman or Saxon origin. It was destroyed during the incursions of the Danes, and rebuilt by William the Conqueror. Not a vestige of it now remains.

## THE CONFLAGRATION.

On Lullwarde's \* distant turrets gleaming,  
On ancient fosse || and vallum beaming,  
(Where Britons erst were made to feel,  
The murd'rous weight of Roman steel;)  
It touch'd on scattered tumuli †  
Where princes, sages, heroes lie;  
It smiled upon a slumb'ring world,  
Ere smoky wreath from chimney curl'd,  
Or yet an early footstep stray'd  
O'er causeway wide, or dewy mead;

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\*Lullwarde, or Lullworth Castle, belonging to the ancient and highly respected family of the Welds; a spot well known to all who are conversant with the history of Dorset.

||A very perfect Roman encampment, in complete preservation.— It lies about six miles south-west of Wareham, close by the Monastery of La Trappe.

†These tumuli, (or barrows as they are commonly called,) are of very remote antiquity; most probably the simple, but affecting monuments raised over the ashes of our forefathers, who gloriously fell in endeavouring to check the lawless lust of Roman Conquest.

Ah me! that evening so forlorn,  
Should follow such a sabbath morn!  
Oh who could dream that dawn so fair,  
Of noon so sad the harbinger?

Borne on the gale, St. Mary's bell  
Was heard the hour of pray'r to tell,  
And o'er the Causeway's beaten road  
Mov'd many a heart to meet its God;  
The lisping babe, the hoary head,  
The vig'rous swain, the blushing maid;  
—What tho' to different shrines they tend,  
What tho' at different altars bend,  
One common father still they own,  
Their saviour, their redeemer one:  
One common track they all pursue,  
Still the same heaven keep in view;  
The humble, contrite, and sincere,  
Were ne'er denied admittance there.



From mortal ken securely veiled,  
The dæmon of destruction smiled  
To think how soon the sparkling eye,  
Would gaze in idiot vacancy,  
On blasted hope, on withered joy,  
On houseless, homeless family;  
To think how soon the placid brow  
Would wear the cypress wreath of woe;  
To think adown the mantling cheek,  
How soon the flood of woe would break;  
To think how soon the cheerful tone  
Would yield to sorrow's listless moan;  
And waited with infernal joy  
His stern commission, to destroy.

Assembled in the house of pray'r,  
Each bade adieu to mortal care,  
Each bowed in solemn homage there.

In various forms they join to raise,  
The suppliant vow, the hymn of praise.  
Tho' here in simpler strain 'twas sung,  
Or there response liturgic rung,  
Here unadorned by human rite,  
Or there prescribed by legal might,  
Yet if the language of the soul,  
If scorning earth's impure controul,  
If claiming kindred in the skies,  
—'Twas an accepted sacrifice !

The house of prayer! oh blissful spot  
Where care and passion are forgot;  
The house of prayer! oh favor'd place  
Th' abode of purity and peace!  
For sometimes 'there 'tis giv'n to know  
The highest bliss enjoyed below;  
When mercy banishes the load  
Of guilt, it is the "house of God."

When through a saviour's blood forgiv'n,  
It is almost the "gate of heav'n."

Hark! Hark! what means that wild uproar?  
The hideous shriek, the thund'ring door!  
The deaf'ning shout, the mingled cry,  
The gasp convulsed of misery!!

*Fire! Fire!* in horrid yells resounds,  
*Fire! Fire!* the vaulted roof rebounds:  
Heard thro' the eager crowd, *where? where?*  
Each longs to know, yet dreads to hear.

And oh what human tongue can tell,  
How like a load of ice it fell,  
What pen describe th' heart-rending groan  
Of him who heard it was his own?  
Affrighted, pale, the rushing throng,  
Slow moved the glutted aisle along;

In ev'ry face confusion reign'd,  
And when the open space they gain'd,  
The bridge in breathless haste they crossed,  
And gazed in speechless horror lost !.

Black smoky volumes rolled on high  
As blazing STOBRO' fixed the eye!  
Near as with beating hearts they drew,  
Dark and more dark these volumes grew:  
How lengthen'd now the causeway seemed,  
How distant now their home they deemed;  
The trembling limbs reluctant bear,  
The eager, anxious spirit there:  
The load that pressed the heart upon  
Depriv'd each sinew of its tone;  
The weight upon the soul that bore,  
Robbed the strong muscle of its pow'r;  
With falt'ring steps fatigued, and slow,  
They entered on the scene of woe.

## THE CONFLAGRATION.

But think ye did the suff'ers hear

The deaf'ning clank of engineer?

The frequent oath, the stunning cry,

Or friendlier voice of sympathy?

Say, did the suff'ers eye behold

The blaze o'er other roofs that rolled?

Or feel the suffocating glow,

That beat so fiercely on the brow?

Ah no! they heard, they thought of none,

But for himself each felt alone.

'Twas theirs to cry in frantic strain

For aid, when human aid was vain;

The madd'ning wish for help to feel,

Yet know that help impossible.

To see the blaze in triumph tow'ring,

To see the greedy flames devouring,

The roof beneath whose peaceful shade

They many a long, long night had laid,



And all they loved to gaze upon,  
—'Twas hard to say "Thy will be done".

Keenly 'twas given, in that dread hour,  
To feel how weak is mortal power ;  
Deeply in that fell scene to know  
How little, boasting man, can do.

Long had the skies the vernal rain  
Witheld, and parch'd was vale and plain ;  
Dry was the reeded roof, and all  
Conspired to hasten Stobro's fall.

Rapid as light'ning spread the blaze,  
Encircling in its dire embrace  
The humble cot, or statelier pile,  
Relentless, irresistible.  
Vainly was plied the engine's power,  
The flames deride the puny shower,

And spared alone the blacken'd wall,  
As monumental of its fall.

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The setting sun on Redcliffe throws,  
Its last declining beam ;  
The swallow laves her rapid wing,  
In Fromes unruffled stream.

Proud Purbeck's everlasting hills  
In solemn grandeur rise ;  
There Creech its double summit rears,  
And props th' incumbent skies.

Ah me! across the broad causeway

No cheerful foot is treading ;

No holy soul at Mary's shrine

The hand of prayer is spreading.

In yonder lowly, simple fane

No suppliant knee is bowing ;

No voice declares the word of truth,

No lip with praise is glowing ;

In sorrows measured pace each moved along,

Cheerless each face and mournful every tongue.

Sad and silent' was the meeting,

Short and joyless was the greeting,

Dejection sat in every eye,

The sternest bosom heav'd a sigh ;

Nor could the hardest heart forbear  
The mournful tribute of a tear,  
To see the cot at break of day,  
That smiled, a shapeless ruin lay ;  
The hamlet, late the abode of peace,  
A ghastly scene of wretchedness.  
'Twas like the sullen sound of knell,  
Or silence after funeral ;  
Or walking o'er some battle-plain,  
Midst heaps of wounded, dying, slain ;  
Or it was like the day of death,  
When some dear form resign'd its breath,  
Ere yet the lov'd remains are cold.  
Or where some storm terrific rolled,  
And left behind a ruined waste,  
Dire trophy of the tempest past ;  
'Twas like the momentary gleam  
Of some soul-harrowing, fitful dream ;

Scarce can the mind be made to feel,  
It is a thing so horrible.

Ill-fated Stobro'! doomed to know,  
Reiterated scenes of woe;  
Unhappy Village! made to feel,  
Repeated strokes of heavy ill;  
To smart beneath the chast'ning rod,  
The awful visits of thy God!!  
Twice hath the stern decree of heaven,  
The flames their fierce commission given  
To rase thy dwellings to the ground,  
In one short year's eventful round.  
Oh! hear the rod!—consider!—pause!  
And ask thee, “Is there not a cause?”  
Say, is the Sabbath thy delight?  
Say, is it honored in thy sight?  
Does earnest prayer like incense rise  
As morn and evening sacrifice?



Say are there none who dare blaspheme  
With impious tongue Jehovah's name?  
Say are there none who dare disgrace  
Thy streets with riot and excess?  
And are there none who dare despise  
Heav'n's choicest boon, man's richest prize,  
That sacred book, whose ample page  
Can misery, pain, and grief assuage,  
Support us in life's thorny road,  
And guide the wand'ring soul to God?  
Now while his judgments are display'd confess,  
His power supreme, and learn his righteousness.

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FINIS.  
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## ERRATA:

Page 10, line 6, *for* regal, *read* legal.

